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Push-Button 'Potentials'

Computer Helps President Make Appointments

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Washington — The son of a big Democratic contributor was thoroughly chagrined by the answer he received from the White House regarding a top federal job he wanted.

"We ran your name through, but it didn't pop up again," he was told matter-of-factly. "You know, we had 43 others which did."

Likewise nonplussed were the experts on political patronage when a man they had never thought of — James Wadsworth, former United Nations ambassador under the Eisenhower administration — turned out to be President Johnson's choice for a Republican vacancy on the Federal Communications Commission.

Both examples attest to more than Mr. Johnson's total unpredictability in tapping men for posts in government. They are examples of what's been happening here ever since the President called on the computer to help him in his talent search.

25,000 Names

Tucked away in a room at the Bureau of Standards is an electronic machine which, at the press of a button, can sift through the names and backgrounds of more than 25,000 persons whom the White House considers to be prospective candidates for important federal positions.

What's more, most of those on the lists haven't the faintest idea that their names and records are under consideration.

One of them was Wadsworth, who first learned that something was stirring when he received word that Mr. Johnson wanted to see him at the White House.

The campaign contributor son tried but couldn't make the list. Relying on the time-honored precept that "it isn't what you know but who you

know," he was completely unaware that the President had added a few new wrinkles to the job-filling process.

Chief Scout

The man most responsible for introducing a scientific personnel system into the White House talent search is 48-year-old John W. Macy, chairman of the U. S. Civil Service Commission. Mr. Johnson has tapped Macy as his chief talent scout.

But Macy doesn't want to be known as a "computerized body-snatcher, doing business by two-way television."

What the computer and the 25,000-name list are doing for Mr. Johnson, says Macy, is to make it easy for the President to weigh the human factors in matching an individual with a job needing to be filled.

"I am convinced that managerial progress cannot be achieved merely through engineering systems and techniques," Macy said. "The human factor in the managerial equation must not only be remembered, it must be emphasized and considered at every point."

Information Restricted

Only a small handful of White House people know whose names have been fed

into the computer—and even they don't know all the jobs for which they may be likely candidates.

The "potentials," as prospects are called, come from many and varied sources.

Cabinet officers and White House advisers sometimes suggest names. Mr. Johnson may solicit names from businessmen or AFL-CIO President George Meany or Walter P. Reuther, United Auto Workers president. Sometimes he asks a mayor or governor for names of potential appointees. Or Mr.

Johnson may be impressed by a person he's read about in the papers or the signature at the bottom of a foreign policy report.

Data about the potentials is fed into the computer and waits there until Mr. Johnson makes known the kind of individual he wants for a specific job. Then the machine sifts through the 25,000 cards and comes up with a list of those who might qualify. Often the President or his subordinates add the names of others obviously qualified for the post under consideration.

Picks 3 or 4

According to White House intimates, Mr. Johnson filters through the select list like a schoolteacher grading test papers, finally selecting for intimate review about three or four with experience, youth, reputation and dedication to his own goals of government.

The men Mr. Johnson is apt to like are those with successful careers in business or government. He picked Admiral William F. Raborn to head the

sensitive Central Intelligence Agency because of Raborn's outstanding record as developer of the Polaris missile system.

He chose another military man for what is supposed to be a civilian job when he picked retired Gen. William McKee to head up the Federal Aviation Administration. Why? Because McKee was rated the top procurement officer in the country and the President wanted that kind of man to expedite the supersonic transport project.

He chose another military man for what is supposed to be a civilian job when he

picked John T. Connor, the New Jersey drug executive, to be Commerce Secretary because of Connor's standing within the business world.

Diplomatic Corps

A vast majority—73 percent—of the President's 116 ambassadorial appointments have gone to career men in the State Department. Macy says that is "an all-time high." In all, about half of those named to top federal posts have come from within government. All of the No. 2 jobs in the ten Cabinet departments have been filled by promotion of men already there.

It is unlikely that President Johnson called on the computer before choosing Associate Justice Arthur J. Goldberg to succeed the late Earl Warren. But he has said more than once that, "in the end, the evaluation of me will depend on the kind of appointments I make."

That he really believes it can be judged by the effort he makes and the pride he has taken in his appointments thus far.